DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 818 FL 017 619

AUTHOR Bolander, Maria
TITLE On the Acquisition of Word Order Rules in Swedish as a Second Language.
PUB DATE Aug 87
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented under the title "On Word Order in Swedish Learner Language" at the World Conference of Applied Linguistics (8th, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, August 16-21, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; Finnish; Foreign Countries; Language Patterns; *Language Processing; Learning Strategies; *Negative Forms (Language); Polish; Second Language Learning; *Sentence Structure; Spanish; *Swedish
IDENTIFIERS *Word Order

ABSTRACT

A study investigating favorable and unfavorable contexts for learning some word order rules in Swedish as a second language is reported. The rules examined are subject-verb inversion after a preposed non-subject in main clauses and the rules for placement of the negative particle. Subjects were 60 adult native speakers of Finnish, Polish, and Spanish. Subjects were divided into six groups according to Swedish language ability and native language. Their use of the Swedish rules was examined in three types of language: free conversation from interviews, picture descriptions, and judgments of the sentence correctness. Results show (1) that high level learners use more inversion structures and more correct structures than low level learners, and (2) that no systematic differences exist between native language groups, different recording occasions, and different speech production tasks with regard to how inversion is used. Differences in rule application appear to be due to the type of construction. It is also concluded that frequent and needed sentences are learned and used as formulas, and that some sentences are stored and processed as units, occasionally violating syntactic rules. Some variability in awareness of the inversion rule is found, with speech production correlated with this awareness. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED299818

ON THE ACQUISITION OF WORD ORDER RULES IN SWEDISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

by

Maria Bolander

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Bolander

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Correspondence to: Dr Maria Bolander,
Department of Scandianavian Languages,
Umeå University,
S-901 87 Umeå,
SWEDEN

FL 017619

Paper presented at the World Conference of Applied Linguistics
University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia
16-21 August 1987

ABSTRACT

The present paper reports on studies of favourable/unfavourable contexts for the acquisition of some word order rules in Swedish. The rules investigated are subject-verb inversion after a preposed non-subject in main clauses and the rules for the placement of the negative particle. The study is based on three types of data from 60 tutored adult learners of Swedish with Finnish, Polish, and Spanish as their native languages.

Furthermore, some strategies or principles for language learning and language processing are discussed, mainly in terms of communicative need, frequency in input and output, and formulaic speech. The conclusions drawn at the end of the paper are that (1) a functionally motivated rule is acquired earlier than a rule which is solely grammatically motivated, (2) communicative needs govern the acquisition, and (3) a common strategy in second language learning is to "tune in" and memorize frequent and needed sequences of words as formulas and use them as prefabricated patterns.

INTRODUCTION

All four languages involved in this study are SVO- and subject-prominent languages, but the word order in the learners' mother tongues is more pragmatic than Swedish word order. Swedish has grammatical word order although word order in Swedish is not totally fixed. In certain positions, Swedish has pragmatic options as well.

Swedish - like for example German - is often said to be a "verb-second" language, which means that when for pragmatic reasons an element other than the subject is placed in the first position the word order must be altered from S-V-X to X-V-S. This is a grammatical rule that is hard to acquire when learning Swedish as a second

language (cf Hammarberg, 1985).

The acquisition of the inversion rule for declarative main clauses has previously been studied by Klein and Dittmar (1979) and Clahsen, Meisel, and Pienemann (1983) for German, and Hyltenstam (1978) and Dahlbäck (1981) for Swedish. In Hyltenstams study on favourable contexts, the results - based on elicited data - did not indicate that any context is more favourable than any other. In Dahlbäcks study, on the other hand, which was also based on elicited data, it was found that the inversion rule was more often correctly applied in sentences preposed by objects than in those preposed by adverbials.

Against this background it is of interest to investigate whether spontaneous speech data might further elucidate the pattern of acquisition of the inversion rule.

METHODS

This study is based on data from 60 adult learners of Swedish as a second language: 20 Finnish, 20 Polish, and 20 Spanish speaking learners. Each of these groups of 20 learners consists of 10 high level and 10 low level learners. Taking native language and proficiency level into account, we can thus distinguish 6 different learner groups: high Finnish, low Finnish, high Polish etc. The allocation of the subjects to the high level and low level groups, respectively, was done by a labour training center where the subjects were attending a course in Swedish during a 4 month period when the data was collected.

The present study is based on data of three different types: (1) free speech from a 15 minute interview conducted at the begin-

ning and at the end of the course, (2) speech from a picture description task, and (3) an acceptability test, in which the learners were asked to judge and correct written sentences.

All declarative main clauses were divided into error-free clauses and clauses containing errors for each learner and for each of the learner groups. Furthermore, all declarative main clauses were coded with respect to (a) type of subject (b) type of verb (c) type of preposed element (d) the data type (interview/picture description) and (5) the occasion for the recording.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As expected, the high level learners use more inversion structures, and show more correct applications of the inversion rule than the low level learners. No systematic differences were found between learners with different mother tongues.

An examination of the data from the two recording sessions for each individual learner and for each of the six groups showed few significant differences in the application of the inversion rule. Some of the learners produce slightly more error-free clauses at the end of the Swedish course, thereby indicating acquisition of the rule during the course, but for others the results are the opposite.

Thus, despite focused instruction during the Swedish course, the rule seems to be acquired slowly over a long period of time - a finding that is in agreement with the results reported by Clahsen (1984) for the acquisition of the German inversion rule.

Likewise, a comparison between the interview data and data from the picture description task reveal only minor differences in how

the rule was applied. Furthermore, the results of this study show that differences in the application of the inversion rule seem to be due to the type of constructions, and thus only indirectly to the type of task (see below on the discourse functions of the inversion clauses).

As it would appear that there are no obvious and systematic differences between the native language groups, the different recording occasions and the different speech production tasks with regard to how inversion is executed, the present paper displays only the total numbers and relative frequencies for correct application in different contexts, i.e. the type of subject, verb, and the preposed elements, for the learners as a whole. Furthermore, the discourse functions of the clauses are considered.

Concerning the **subjects** of the inversion clauses, the categories examined are: (1) nouns/NP:s, (2) the indefinite pronoun man 'one', (3) the first person pronouns jag 'I' and vi 'we', (4) the second and the third person pronouns, and (5) the empty slot-filler det 'it/there'. The second and third person pronouns were grouped together as no systematic differences for these types of pronouns could be found.

Table 1. Frequencies for different types of subjects (upper values - total numbers; lower values - relative frequencies of correctness)

jag/vi	"PRON"	N/NP	det	man	TOT
1 274	852	635	292	235	3 288
0.43	**0.22**	**0.56**	**0.33**	**0.50**	**0.40**

The most frequent subjects in the data are the pronouns jag/vi 'I/we', the other pronouns, and the nouns. The reason for the high number of jag/vi is of course the topics of the interviews: the

learners do a lot of talking about their earlier lives, their home countries and so on. (It is noticeable that many of the learners are quite error-free at the very beginning of the interviews, but subsequently, when they become more involved in the conversation and more focused on their messages, they seem to forget the linguistic form.)

Thus, the first person pronouns are the most frequent, but they are not the subjects of the most error-free clauses. The highest values for relative frequency of correctness are in fact obtained for nouns and the indefinite pronoun man 'one'.

As for the verbs in these inversion clauses the most frequent are: vara 'be' 376, komma 'come' 228, kan/kunde 'can/could' 200, tro 'think/believe' 184, måste (+V) 'must' (+V) 153, gå 'go' 113, ha 'have' + V 106, ta 'take' 104, finnas 'be/exist' 88, and göra 'make/do' 72.

Ranked after correctness, however, the order for verbs with at least 40 occurences in inversion clauses is the following: tycka 'think' 0.77, komma 'come' 0.74, tro 'think/believe' 0.59, veta 'know' 0.54, kan/kunde 'can/could' 0.48, ha + V 'have + V 0.47, bli 'become' 0.45, ska/skulle 'will/would' 0.43, göra 'make/do' 0.41, and finnas 'be/exist' 0.40. In this latter grouping, there are 3 verbs expressing opinion/belief and two modal auxiliaries. The high number for the verb komma 'come' is caused by high frequency of occurrence in the picture descriptions (cf below).

Interestingly, the most frequent verb vara 'be' is not among the "most correct" verbs, whereas we find verbs in this category that do not rank high in frequency, namely veta 'know', bli 'become', and ska/skulle 'will/would'. These results support similar findings

from other studies (for a discussion see e.g. Dulay and Burt, 1978; Chaudron, 1985), that show that the frequency of a structure is not sufficient for succesful acquisition. One explanation in this case may be differences in perceptual salience for different combinations of verbs and subjects.

The copula vara is very often combined with det 'it/there', and the relative frequency of correctness for the combination är det 'it/there is' is 0.26, which is a rather low value compared to for example, the similar combination kommer det 0.45. The semantically empty combination är det 'is it/there' is very often pronounced very fast and unstressed, and the different sounds are often very hard to distinguish - even for native speakers (cf Bolander and Hene, 1982).

Another pronounciation of är det, and a more salient one, is ä re which is similar to a common pronounciation of kommer det as komme re. Evidence for the importance of input and pronounciation for the perception and acquisition of these combinations may be that some of the subjects use the form re instead of det in initial position too, e.g. re tycke ja.

Furthermore, it may also be possible that salient combinations as komme re are memorized as formulas. An indication of this may be that some of the learners in this study make overgeneralizations with komme re, which is also the case for another frequent and very often correct inverted combination, namely kan man.

In order to clarify, what combinations these most frequent verbs occur in, the inversion clauses were divided into three groups according to their **discourse functions**:

(1) existentials/presentatives without det 'it/there, e.g. sen kommer ambulans 'then comes ambulance'

(2) all clauses containing det, e.g. så kommer de bil 'then comes there car'

(3) narrative clauses with a "known" pronoun/noun as a subject, e.g. då kom hon hit 'then came she here'

The narrative clauses are divided into two subgroups according to the type of subjects: (a) first person pronouns and (b) nouns, second/third person pronouns and the indefinite pronoun man 'one'.

Table 2. Correctness in different types of clauses[1]

	EXISTENTIALS/ PRESENTATIVES	EXISTENTIALS/ NARRATIVES with det	NARRATIVES	
SUBJECTS	N/NP	det	jag/vi	N/PRON/man
VERBS				
finnas 'be/exist'	1.	0.34	-	-
komma 'come'	0.95	0.45	0.27	0.16
sitta 'sit'	0.94	(0)	-	-
vara 'be'	0.91	0.26	0.33	0.27
stå 'stand'	0.83	(0.25)	-	(0)
flyga 'fly'	0.78	(0.25)	(0)	(0)
gå 'go'	(0.5)	0.43	0.31	0.20
ta 'take'	-	(0)	0.13	0.20
klä av/på 'undress/ dress'	-	-	-	0.08

[1] The values within brackets denote less than 5 occurences.

For these learners, the results for correct application of the inversion rule show conspicuosly higher values in the clauses consisting of existentials/presentatives without det 'there', which indicates a preference to place new information towards the end of

the clause. This is a tendency known from many languages, including the learners' mother tongues (cf e.g. Givón, 1983; Grzegorek, 1984). Hence, an explanation of the findings in terms of transfer is also a possibility, (cf Zobl, 1983).

As for the two subgroups of subject types in the narratives, the differences are small with somewhat higher values for the first person pronouns. In clear contrast to the high values for the presentative verbs are the low values for the verbs ta 'take' and klä av/på 'undress/dress'. One reason for the extraordinary low value for klä av/på may be that many of the learners seem to have vocabulary problems in describing some of the pictures where this verb is used. Thus, the syntactic rule not yet integrated seems to be violated when the processing capacity is overloaded by searching for adequate lexical units, which is a tendency found not only in the inversion study but also in the study of negation (cf Bolander, 1987).

Remarkably low are also the values for the first person pronoun jag as subject in combination with ta 'take'. In these occurences, all but one contain frequent combinations, some of which are most formula-like, e.g. ta tåget 'take the train' and ta det lugnt 'take it easy'. All these combinations are frequently used in everyday speech and, perhaps, these occurences might be seen as some kind of fossilization. Very likely, such combinations are acquired early in order to handle daily life situations. Thus, they are acquired at the SVO-stage where a great part of the efforts are given to the explicit marking of the pronominal subjects which are obligatory in Swedish but not in the learners' mother tongues. Later, when the rule for inversion is being acquired, the combination pronominal

subjects followed by verb may be highly integrated in interlanguage as S-V which restricts the syntactic inversion rule.

For these learners such a hypothesis is also supported by the results for other contexts, for example the verbs prata and förstå. This is the case for the inversion as well as for the negation study.

Further evidence for such a hypothesis on early bound S-V-order for pronominal subjects may be the fact that several of these learners correct themselves in the following way: sen går 'then goes' immediately corrected to sen hon går 'then she goes'. This may be interpreted as if the learner, when hearing her/his utterance, becomes concious of the rule for obligatory pronominal subject, restarts and add the subject with the dominant order S-V.

Thus, the most favourable context for the application of the inversion rule seems to be the existential or presentative constructions in which the inversion can be conceived as having a pragmatic function as well (cf Pfaff, 1986).

The results with regard to **preposed elements** are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Frequencies for different types of preposed elements (upper values - total numbers; lower values - relative frequencies of correctness)

ADVERBS	PP	OBJECTS	SUB-CLAUSES	PRED	TOT
1 932	561	403	373	19	3 288
0.36	0.35	0.82	0.19	0.35	0.40

ABBRIVIATIONS: PP - preposition phrases, SUB-CLAUSES - subordinate clauses, PRED - predicatives

The most frequent preposed elements are, as expected, the adverbs followed by the preposition phrases and the objects. The most

frequent adverbs are sen /då 'then' (967), nu 'now' (164) här/där 'here/there' (164).

However, with regard to correct application of the inversion rule, clauses preposed by objects have the highest values and clauses preposed by subordinate clauses the lowest. Due to the higher degree of complexity, the results for the subordinate clauses may be said to be expected, but the high values for the objects may seem somewhat surprising. Preposed objects are often said to have low frequency in Swedish and in grammars for teaching Swedish as a second language recommendations can sometimes be found not to introduce this type of clause at earlier stages in teaching.

A more detailed analysis of these clauses, however, provides some explanation for these results, since most of the object clauses are of the following type:

(1) de tror ja 'it/so think I'
(2) de kunde man göra 'it/so could one do'
(3) de har ja läst 'it have I read'
(4) de utnyttjade ja 'it made use of I'

We see that the clauses are very similar in their construction. Although all elements but det are varied, the clauses are very formulaic. The question is then whether they result from a creative rule or some kind of formulaic rule. All elements but det are varied, but yet the clauses are very formulaic.

Inversion in this kind of clauses also appear when the object is omitted:

(5) 0 [det] kan man säja '0 [it/so] can one say'
(6) 0 [det] tycke ja '0 [it/so] think I'
(7) 0 [det] måste ja säja '0 [it/so] must I say'

This "formula", then, seems to be rather well integrated in the interlanguage of these learners, and this is the case for most of these learners.

Some kind of formulaic speech is most probably the case in the following tag-like type too:

(8) han pratar bra spanska tycker ja
'he speaks good Spanish think I'
(9) de håller värme bättre menar ja
'they keep warm better mean I'

The verbs used in this type of construction are verbs used to express personal points of view, and some of them are found among the verbs with the high values for correctness displayed earlier in the paper.

The most frequent and also most error-free of these two constructions are the clauses preposed by det 'it/so'. The most frequent subject is jag, and the correctness for this type is as high as 0.92.

To summarize so far, two tendencies are especially worth noting. Firstly, the inversion rule seems to be acquired earlier in combination with the first person pronouns than in combination with the other pronouns in nearly all contexts. This might perhaps be explained by some principle like the suggested "me-first-principle" or the "closeness-to-ego" principle for choosing perspective in language (for a discussion see Bates and Mac Whinney, 1982). Another very favourable context is that of clauses containing a preposed object det 'it/so'.

For both these contexts, early acquisition is highly probable due both to the learners' communicative need and frequency of input. Studies on spoken Swedish have shown that inversion-clauses preposed by the object det 'it/so' are highly frequent in spoken Swedish (Jörgensen 1976), and used by speakers to confirm their own or the interlocutor's utterances.

A question that remains, however, is whether there are any other

error-free clauses preposed by objects except these formula-like ones. This is in fact the case, and they contain different types of objects, verbs and subjects. The correctness for these clauses is 0.6, i.e. not as high as the values for the formulaic ones, but higher than for e.g. clauses preposed by adverbs with 0.36.

This indicates that the rule for inversion in "object-clauses" is acquired earlier than in for example "adverb-clauses" which is a result in accordance with the result of the above mentioned study on elicited data conducted by Dahlbäck (1981). One interpretation of these results may be that formula learning can be one way of acquiring abstract grammatical rules.

However, formula learning may also cause some trouble in later acquisition of syntactic rules. One example of this is shown in the negation study based on the same data (Bolander, 1987). In Swedish main clauses the negative particle inte has the marked position after the finite verb and in the context of complex verbs this means that the particle is placed immediately before the non-finite verb. Yet, very often in early Swedish learner language the negative particle has the position before the finite verb. However, many of the learners in this study make only a few errors in the placement of negation in main clauses, but those errors that do occur are found in the context of complex verbs and show an interesting pattern. In all but one of these occurences the negation is placed after the non-finite verb, which is a position very little discussed in earlier studies. In some of these cases the placement should probably be interpreted as negation of constituent, mostly an object (cf Clahsen et al, 1983), but many of these occurrences are of the following kind:

(10) han kan säja inte så mycke
'he can say not very much'
(11) de har blivi inte så mycke svårare
'it has become not very much more difficult'
(12) dom hade haft inte så många kompisar innan
'they had had not so many pals before'

It seems reasonable to suppose that the frequent and useful sequences inte så mycket/många/adjective 'not very much/many/' or an adjective has been perceived as formulas and are used as such in processing. This pattern is shown in subordinate clauses too, and in the contexts where there is a need to split the sequence the result is very often an error clause - also by learners who in other contexts are error-free.

Thus, the study of these 60 learners repeatedly indicates that frequent and needed sequences are learned and used as formulas and that formulaic speech is a common phenomenon (cf Hatch, 1973; Hakuta, 1974). Furthermore, such sequences seem to be stored and processed as units, which sometimes violates the application of syntactic rules under acquisition.

At least 10 of these 60 learners show tendencies towards what may be called "formulaic learning" in the sense that they show occurences of all the mentioned examples of formulaic speech.

The main trends observed for the group of learners as a whole are also clearly reflected among the individual learners: the types with high values for correctness are the ones that are produced by learners with only a few correct inversion clauses, and the errors made by the advanced learners are those with low values for correctness.

As for the **awareness of the inversion rule**, there seems to be some variability among the learners. Some of them clearly indicate by correcting themselves that they are aware of the rule, and fur-

thermore, the acceptability test indicates that, as a whole, their speech production is correlated to awareness of the rule.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The results of this inversion study indicate that the errors observed are not totally random. There seems to be an interaction between the type of verb, subject and preposed elements, and moreover some contexts seem to be more favourable for the learners' application of the inversion rule.

Based on the data presented, the following generalizations can be made for order of acquisition for the inversion rule:

- FAVOURABLE CONTEXTS/EARLY ACQUIRED are: existentials/presentatives without the empty slot-filler det 'it/there' and clauses preposed by objects. Furthermore, clauses containing first person pronouns as subjects are more favourable than subjects that are second and third person pronouns.

- UNFAVOURABLE CONTEXTS/LATE ACQUIRED are: clauses preposed by adverbs - especially sen 'then/after that' - and subordinate clauses. Also unfavourable are contexts where the speaker does not have access to adequate lexical units.

In summary, the main results of these studies on the acquisition of word order rules as interpreted here are the following:

- a functionally motivated rule is earlier acquired than a rule which is solely grammatically motivated

- communicative needs govern acquisition and a common strategy in second language learning is to "tune in" and memorize frequent and needed sequences of words as formulas which later are sometimes hard to break for syntactic purposes

Depending on personality and eagerness to communicate, such a strategy may more often be used by certain learners than by others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is part of the project "Språkutveckling och undervisningsmodeller" (SUM), which has been financed by The Swedish National Board of Education. I would like to thank Kenneth Hyltenstam and Christopher Stroud for valuable comments on the manuscript, and Håkan Johansson for valuable and inspiring discussions around different hypotheses concerning the brain's processing of language.

REFERENCES

Bates, E. and Mac Whinney, B. 1982. Functionalist approaches to grammar. Wanner, E. and Gleitman, L.R. (eds) Language Acquisition: the state of the art. London: Cambridge University Press.

Bolander, M. 1987. Is there any order? On Word Order in Swedish Learner Language. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development Vol 9, Nos 1&2, 1988.

Bolander, M. and Hene, B. 1982. "Hä gå bra dä!" Varianter till det i regionalt standardspråk i Arvidsjaur. Elert, C.C., Fries, S. (utg) Nordsvenska. Umeå: Acta Universitatis Umensis.

Chaudron, C. 1985. Comprehension, Comprehensibility, and Learning in the Second Language Classroom. Faerch, C. and Kasper, G. (eds) Foreign Language Learning under Classroom Conditions. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Clahsen, H. 1984. The Acquisition of German Word Order: A Test Case for Cognitive Approaches to L2 Development. Andersen, R.W. (ed) Second Languages: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective. Rowley/Mass: Newbury House Publishers.

Clahsen, H., Meisel, J.M. and Pienemann, M. 1983. Deutsch als Zweitsprache. Der Spracherwerb ausländischer Arbeiter. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.

Dahlbäck, H. 1981. Datatyp och interimspråkskompetens 1. En variationsanalys av olika slags testdata på inversion och rak ordföljd i invandrares svenska. University of Lund: Department of Linguistics.

Dulay, H. and Burt, M. 1978. Some remarks on creativity in language acquisition. Ritchie, W.C. (ed) Second language acquisition research: Issues and Implications. New York: Academic Press, Inc.

Givón, T. (ed) 1983. Topic Continuity in Discourse. A Quantitative Cross-linguistic Study. New York, San Fransisco: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Grzegorek, M. 1984. Thematization in English and Polish. A study in word order. Poznan: UAM.

Hakuta, K. 1974. Prefabricated patterns and the emergence of structure in second language acquisition. Language learning, 24, 287-97.

Hammarberg, B. 1985. Learnability and Learner Strategies in Second Language Syntax and Phonology. Hyltenstam, K. and Pienemann, M. Modelling and Assessing Second Language Acquisition. Avon: Multi-

lingual Matters.
Hatch, E. 1973. Second language learning - universals? Working Papers on Bilingualism, 3, 1-18.
Hyltenstam, K. 1978. Variation in interlanguage syntax. Working Papers 18. Lund: Department of General Linguistics.
Jörgensen, N. 1976. Meningsbyggnaden i talad svenska. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
Klein, W. and Dittmar, N. 1979. Developing Grammars. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag.
Pfaff, C.W. 1986. Functional Approaches to Interlanguage. Pfaff, C.W. (ed) First and second language acquisition processes. Cambridge: Newbury House Publishers.
Zobl, H. 1983. L1 acquisition, age of L2 acquisition, and the learning of word order. Gass, S. and Selinker, L. (eds) Language transfer in language learning. Rowley/Mass: Newbury House Publishers.